

32. *Knowing in order to love*

I must say, your disdain for meditation does not appear totally pure to me. You are right in thinking that mental prayer is not supposed to be an intellectual exercise but a time of intimacy with God, and that the intellect must give precedence to the heart. But I fear that, under the pretext of saving the primacy of love, you underestimate the place mental prayer must give to knowledge of God.

Your attitude is one that women tend to espouse, whereas men are more inclined to intellectualism. Both tendencies are dangerous. Men must be warned of the peril they face. This is all the more formidable because their spiritual life is compartmentalized. They are not always making connections between their intellect, heart and will. Knowledge does not necessarily lead them to love. But the affective mental prayer that you rightly hold in esteem conceals another danger. A love inadequately nourished by knowledge can degenerate into sentimentalism.

It is not only women who tend to belittle and reject meditation, but your whole generation. It is probably a reaction against the methods of meditation that are accused of imprisoning the soul instead of giving it wings. It is nonetheless regrettable that the deserved discredit into which certain methods have fallen should extend to all efforts to know God.

Call to mind the conference you attended with your husband a month ago. I told you that marital love declines when spouses give up their daily search to discover each other. The same applies to our relations with God. Love is jeopardized when the efforts to know him slackens. Knowledge and love (that is to say, faith and charity) are closely interrelated.

Refuse to resign yourself to a faith, to a knowledge of God, that is half-asleep. Awaken it. How? The way you get your little son Mark to wake up in the morning. He is slow to open his eyes, and his lids are heavy with sleep. He does not recognize anything around him, and goes back to sleep. Finally, after your repeated calls, he awakens and focuses his eyes on your face smiling at him. He smiles back and suddenly takes an interest in the beautiful day you promise him.

Do the same for your faith. Offer your faith something that will capture its attention. Draw it anew to the face of God, which it could no longer discern in its dormant state.

But it is not in a few moments (or even a few weeks) that one awakens a dormant faith, and gives it alacrity, penetration, and intense life. The great means of reviving faith, of enriching and vitalizing it, is mental prayer, that is, meditation. Persons whose faith is keenly alive, because they nurture it day after day by study and reflection, need only to love God when they go to mental prayer. They are prepared. For others, there is need of patient, laborious exercise in knowing God through the practice of mental prayer-meditation. In the end, their faith will certainly come awake and alive. It will arouse their love, and raise their hearts up in prayer.

I recommend that you recite the following prayer of St. Augustine from time to time. It will kindle in you the need to know and will stimulate your search.

“O Lord my God, my only hope, listen to me! Do not permit me to stop seeking you out of lassitude, but grant that I may eagerly seek your face. Give me the strength to seek you, just as you have enabled me to find you more and more. Here before you are my strength and infirmity: guard my strength, heal my infirmity. Here before you are my knowledge and my ignorance: where you have opened the way to me, welcome my coming; where you have closed the door, open it to my cry.”